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Intergovernmental negotiating committee to prepare a global legally binding instrument on mercury
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Item 3 (d) of the provisional agenda*

Work to prepare for the entry into force of the Minamata Convention on Mercury and for the first meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention: activities to facilitate the rapid entry into force of the Convention and its effective implementation upon entry into force

Overview of progress in the development of public health strategies on artisanal and small-scale gold mining, including in the context of the Minamata Convention on Mercury

Note by the secretariat

At its sixth session, the intergovernmental negotiating committee decided that the guidance on artisanal and small-scale gold mining developed under the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Global Mercury Partnership should serve as the basis for the preparation of guidance on the development of national action plans on artisanal and small-scale gold mining, and requested the secretariat, in cooperation with the artisanal and small-scale gold mining partnership area of the Global Mercury Partnership and the World Health Organization (WHO), to revise that guidance as required to address all areas set out in Annex C to the Convention, for further consideration by the committee at its seventh session. An overview of progress in the development of public health strategies on artisanal and small-scale gold mining, submitted by WHO, is presented in the annex to the present note, without formal editing.

* UNEP(DTIE)/Hg/INC.7/1.

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Annex

World Health Organization

WHO guidance to support the development of public health strategies on ASGM, including in the context of the Minamata Convention

Progress report

Prepared by WHO, January 2016.

The present document provides an overview of progress made with respect to the development of the above referenced guidance. Information about the status of related products under development is also provided.

Introduction

In paragraph 3 (a) of article 7, the Minamata Convention on Mercury provides that each party that has notified the secretariat that artisanal and small-scale gold mining and processing in its territory are more than insignificant shall develop and implement a national action plan in accordance with annex C to the Convention. Item (h) of annex C indicates that such national action plans should include a public health strategy on the exposure of artisanal and small-scale miners and their communities. Such public health strategies should include inter alia, the gathering of health data, training for health care workers, and awareness-raising through health facilities. Such strategies will also serve to implement a further requirement of Article 7 to include, in national action plans, strategies to prevent the exposure of vulnerable populations, particularly children and women of child-bearing age, especially pregnant women, to mercury used in ASGM.

In response to the above, and in response to a World Health Assembly resolution recognizing the role of health ministries and the World Health Organization (WHO) in supporting the implementation of the Convention, WHO has initiated the development of technical guidance to support the development of public health strategies on ASGM. This guidance is being developed in the form of a technical series. Topics addressed include:

(a) **Developing a public health strategy on ASGM**: This guidance will provide recommendations on the process and stakeholder engagement needed to develop such a strategy. It also provides guidance on focus areas that may be included in the strategy. Particular focus is given to measures/interventions called for under the Convention. Measures to address other relevant public health concerns are also addressed.

(b) **Training of health providers**: This training course has been designed so that it can be adapted for use in training medical practitioners or community health workers on how to identify and address mercury exposure and other environmental and occupational health issues associated with ASGM. The needs of vulnerable populations including children, women and pregnant mothers are also addressed. This training has been developed for use in supporting the implementation of measures called for under the Convention, which must be included as a focus area within the public health strategies.

(c) **Good practice ethical and scientific principles related to the use of human biomonitoring in an ASGM context**: This guidance note will provide a synthesis of good practice standards that are relevant to research conducted that involves human biomonitoring. References to further good practice guidance are also provided. This guidance document is intended to enhance the design and implementation of research activities conducted as part of the development or implementation of public health strategies on ASGM.

(d) **Health hazards associated with ASGM**: This technical report provides an overview of environmental and occupational health hazards associated with ASGM and related impacts on communities. It is intended to serve as a background document to inform the identification of health priorities as part of the process of developing a public health strategy on ASGM.

Status of development of the WHO guidance

Early versions of the above products were developed based on initial experiences gleaned from work conducted on ASGM and health in Mongolia in 2013 and on recommendations provided during a WHO expert consultation on ASGM and health held in Geneva, Switzerland in October 2014.

Significant inputs were provided to the draft guidance on developing a public health strategy (item a), including by several members of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Global Mercury Partnership working group on ASGM. All parties that contributed to the development of this guidance suggested that it would be enhanced if specific case examples from countries were included. Given that several countries have initiated their national action planning processes, including as part of enabling activities supported under the GEF, and given that the WHO guidance is intended to inform that initial NAP planning process (specifically for the public health component), the draft guidance will be piloted in at least two countries during the course of 2016 and first half of 2017. In addition to the pilot activities, feedback from countries and from other relevant stakeholders will also be solicited. It is expected that this guidance will be finalized by the second quarter of 2017 in advance of the first Conference of Parties to the Convention.

The draft training materials (item b) were revised based on feedback provided in the October 2014 consultation and piloted for a second time in Ghana in February 2015. The course materials are currently being updated based on feedback provided by the course participants and by external reviewers. It is expected that the training materials will be finalized and made publically available before the end of 2016.

Items (c) and (d) above are expected to be finalized by end February 2016 and will be made publically available on the WHO website.

The WHO technical guidance described above is being developed in close coordination with colleagues from the UNEP Global Mercury Partnership working group on ASGM that are leading on the development of the NAP guidance. As such it is expected that the approach promoted for the public health components, and in particular the components addressing mercury exposure and protection of vulnerable populations, will be well aligned with and supportive of the wider requirements for the NAP process.